oh! BROTHER

OPEN LETTER TO MEN
Who Say They Believe in Freedom and Equality
Nikki Craft

© 1981 Nikki Craft
French Version

This essay was inspired by Andrea Dworkin, who has taken great personal risks in order to bring this society to a higher political understanding of pornography and violence against women.

Men - liberals, leftists, activists - our brothers, where have you been? Ask yourself what you have been doing during the last two decades of our struggle.

If blacks were being lynched in this country in the same numbers that women are being sexually tortured and slaughtered, you would do something. Or would you? Your failure to grasp the political nature of these heinous crimes against women is inexcusable; your failure to act against them is complicitous.

THE MEN WHO DECLARE THAT POLITICAL activity subsided in the 70s seem to have dozed after the Vietnam War ended. Most liberal and leftist men had indeed dropped out of political activity, allowing the right-wing agendas to emerge in America - but women continued to organize throughout the 70s.

Feminists worked for the Equal Rights Amendment, the specific right to safe, inexpensive, and legal abortions, plus other issues too numerous to list here.

Among the most urgent of these has been the effort to end the systematic sexual terrorism against women. Besides setting up direct services for victims of violence such as rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters, we have worked to dismember the pornography industry.

Men - liberals, leftists, activists - our brothers, where have you been? Your absence from our meetings has been conspicuous. Perhaps it is easier for you to see the atrocities in Vietnam, Iran, Chile and El Salvador than it is for you to see the atrocities committed against women in your own homes and streets. Perhaps it is easier, for those of you who are white, to understand the plight of your black brothers than that of women.

When there was talk of removing Aunt Jemima from the syrup labels, "Amos and Andy" from TV, and the story of "Little Black Sambo" from elementary school libraries, we heard no screams of censorship from you then. It was you who justified forced busing as a necessary inconvenience "in order to achieve racial equality." I believe it was even you who worked for acceptable standards in advertising and movies which would prevent stereotyped roles of blacks in insidious, hateful, racist ways. But you will tolerate no such solutions for women.

Despite your understanding of class and corporate greed and your criticisms of capitalism, you move swiftly and articulately to defend the rights of men who degrade and mutilate women's

bodies in the name of sexuality, profit and entertainment. Pornographers have empires, which they use to encourage oppression and violence against a class of persons who do not now have, and never had, the civil rights vouchsafed to men as a class. The First Amendment belongs to those who can afford to buy it, but all this seems beyond your economic analysis.

You say you can agree with our goals, but it is our tactics you abhor. You have denied us the right to work within the law *and* outside the law. You reprimand us for damaging property. You warn us not to molest magazines that would have us raped; not to tear up magazines that advocate tearing up our bodies. You say the public is likely to misinterpret our message to justify censorship and book burning. But how will men respond to the images they see in pornography? What actions against women are *these* images likely to justify?

When you burned draft cards as a symbolic act in the 60s and burglarized federal buildings to destroy draft records we did not quibble over your tactics. We did not condemn your work against that death industry. Instead, we joined with you hand in hand. What would you have done without us in those years?

These days you even object to our picketing of films that provoke sexist hatred and glorify violence against women (i.e., *Dressed to Kill*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *Body Double)*. You claim that this simple act of public education violates your sacred First Amendment. "If you don't like the film don't go to see it," you tell us. You will boycott lettuce and gladly give up grapes, but when we ask you to give up your dirty books - books that do dirt to women - you laugh and tell us we are being trivial, that we have lost our sense of humor.

You have counseled us to be silent so that freedom of speech will survive. You claim that the First Amendment works only when the pornographers have their unbridled expression, but you ignore the fact that women's voices have been and continue to be gagged by the roar of pornographic misogyny. You have warned that if *Playboy*, *Hustler* and *Penthouse* would bend to our pressure, it could constitute a dangerous precedent, that the enemies of freedom await to descend like ravenous vultures.

You decry fascism on the horizon, but how can you be blind to the same tyranny implicit in pornography? Pornography, most often, dehumanizes women. It reduces us to fethishized objects and provides a blueprint and support network for men who commit acts of sexual terrorism. And you, fully aware of the media's powers to mold mass consciousness, still ask us for proof that these images cause prejudice and violence against us.

Listen! There are atrocities being committed in your own backyards. Read the casualty lists! The names appear by the thousands in eroticized, pornographized newspaper articles: every day, women taken away, one by one by one by one. The torture chamber is not Dachau or Auschwitz. It may be the closet in a house across the street or the windowless van in front of you on the highway. Yet you can look, with that most disgusting smirk, at images of the eroticized and glorified torture, lean back in your easy chair, cross your legs and ever so rationally speculate: "But you know some women want that."

Civil libertarians! You who express your belief in freedom and equality: you have done more than defend pornographers' First Amendment "right" to abuse and degrade women. You have often actively excused it. You have in many cases embraced the bigotry and bought their lies about women. You have read and at times enjoyed this propaganda.

If blacks were being lynched in this country in the same numbers that women are being sexually tortured and slaughtered, you *would* do something. Or would you? Your failure to grasp the political nature of these heinous crimes against women is inexcusable; your failure to act against them is complicitous. Those of you who remain silent should know that you are as guilty as your predecessors who closed their ears to the rumblings of hatred and prejudice expressed towards Jews and others in Nazi Germany. You are as guilty as those who cast their eyes downward as these people were marched away; one by one by one by one.

But if you cannot, or will not, join with us, we ask this of you: at least stop supplying

ammunition to the enemy. Help us break the support network for men who commit these acts of sexual violence against women. Please do not work for pornographers. As we would not work for the Pentagon, we ask that you do not take jobs from Hugh Hefner, Larry Flynt or Bob Guccione. Please do not give interviews, supply photographs or write articles for them. Don't advertise in or help distribute their magazines. Please do not accept their tainted donations for 'liberal/ progressive' political causes. No matter what personal gains are offered you, and they may be significant, do not collaborate against women by giving the pornographers more credibility. Use your creative energies elsewhere. Avoid being entangled in their network of production and distribution, knowing that our blood drips from every dollar they pay.

Lastly, we ask you not to give them your money: don't be consumers of pornography. Don't buy the lies about women, men and sexuality they offer you as truth. Your humanity is victimized by those lies too.

We will see you, brothers. We will see you at the anti-draft rallies, and the demonstrations to halt the atrocities in Nicaragua and South Africa. Rest assured that we will remain beside you in these struggles for the liberation of *all* peoples. At these events, when you look into women's eyes, be glad that we are there. Then - ask yourself what you were doing during the last two decades of our struggle.